



HBCA

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR CHANGE FOR ANIMALS

CASE STUDY



MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY: BEACHWATCH

ORGANISATION MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

COUNTRY SCOTLAND

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Project Background

Beachwatch in Scotland has been formally running since our Head of Conservation Scotland Calum Duncan started the Scotland Programme in 2000, although we did have some volunteers taking part before then. The project basically involves volunteers 'adopting' a 100m stretch of beach to clean and survey up to four times a year. The data is then sent to MCS via our dedicated Beachwatch website where it is analysed by our Pollution team to help shape our campaigns and policy asks. The annual report which is written is based on the data from the flagship event called the Great British Beach Clean which happens over the third weekend of September every year. This is to coincide with the International Coastal Clean Up where over 70 countries around the world take part in cleaning and surveying beaches to allow a global picture to be built on the issue of marine litter.

Beachwatch is the Marine Conservation Society's national beach cleaning and litter surveying citizen science project which has been running for over twenty years. When I started with MCS two years ago one of my main objectives was to increase the amount of beaches and volunteers in Scotland during the flagship weekend in September called the Great British Beach Clean. Through partnership working with schools, communities, charities, organisations, MSPs and volunteers Scotland responded with huge enthusiasm and we managed to increase the amount of beaches in 2015 from 43 to 75 and the amount of volunteers from 663 to 1421! We were thrilled with the response and carried on the same approach and last year we managed to increase the number again to 121 beaches taking part with 1744 volunteers.



The more beaches and volunteers we have taking part, the more valuable data we receive which influences our pollution campaigns and gives us evidence to take to government and other relevant stakeholders to make the important legislative or policy changes needed to stop this litter ending up on the beach in the first place. A huge success where this data has been used was the introduction of the 5p carrier bag charge as the data was used as evidence for its need in the first place and then we could report that after the first year of all UK countries having a charge in place we saw a 40% reduction in carrier bags on our beaches. It is these success stories that our volunteers love to hear as they know what they are doing not only helps their local beach and community but also beaches and seas across the whole country.

Overview of Intervention

To help increase the amount of data from Scotland to help our pollution campaigns and therefore our wildlife and seas I decided to take a partnership approach. The basic idea was to give training and support to different groups in different areas throughout the year to empower them to complete their own surveys and beach cleans for the Great British Beach Clean.

The first groups I contacted were the Coastal Partnerships and Local Authorities. These large overarching groups were then able to promote the project through their networks and pass on my contact details for any individual volunteers who needed assistance or further training. I then contacted schools and offered a free workshop through our education program to help with training for the project and to consolidate learning for the pupils around the link between litter and wildlife and what they could do to help. The initial contact was through email with follow up phone calls completed by myself and some of our Sea Champion volunteers. This personal touch allowed us to talk through any initial concerns and questions and encouraged many more schools especially to be involved. From these initial partnerships the network grew through promotion on social media, articles in magazines and newsletters as well as presentations at conferences.

Allowing the time to connect with each volunteer group whether by a personal email, phone call or face to face meeting saw a huge increase in the amount of participants in my first year. We also followed up with a thank you ring round afterwards to all of the volunteer organizers and ensured communication about the results reached everyone who took part so they could see where their data was going and how it was being used. Taking the project to this next level of understanding also encouraged organisers to take part again the following year after seeing the importance of data coming in regularly over time.

Welfare Concerns

Some of our best-loved marine wildlife is under threat from the waste and litter in our seas, with hundreds of species accidentally eating or becoming entangled in litter. It is also dangerous for people and damaging to our tourism and fishing industries. From turtles and cetaceans ingesting plastic bags to birds getting entangled in line and rope to the growing issue of microplastics working up the food chain, marine litter is impacting all of our oceans and the creatures that call it home.

Achievements

In two years we have managed to increase the number of beaches taking part in the Great British Beach Clean in Scotland from 43 to 121 with an increase in volunteers from 663 to 1744 which is absolutely fantastic.

In 2015 we also had some Sea Champion volunteers join me on a Beach Clean road trip for one of the days we managed to complete 6 beach cleans in one day! We had a great following on social media and were able to connect with other running beach cleans on the same day and were even able to drop by to say hello. Another great event in 2015 was one of the collaborative cleans with Aberdeenshire Council and the Scottish Fishermans Federation at Cairnbulg harbour where we saw members of the community come together to remove nearly five tonnes of litter of a local beach – absolutely incredible and a huge success story for the value of partnership working.

In 2016 our road trip inspired two other members of staff to under take their own and managed to complete 27 beach cleans between then over the four days! We also had some new exciting partnerships with the Royal Zoological Society for Scotland who brought their Wild about Scotland bus to a couple of beach cleans as well as the Childrens University Scotland who added Beachwatch as a project members could claim volunteer hours for. Thanks to partnerships working across the country we had a huge impact in the media with radio interviews, press releases and online as well as in parliament. We had three parliamentary motions filed to congratulate volunteers across the country for taking part in the Great British Beach Clean and we even had 11 MSPs attend their local cleans to support their constituents.

Beachwatch also plays a huge role in raising awareness around certain litter items. For example we have seen a huge increase in the number of wetwipes being found on our beaches – 10,000 were found during the Great British Beach Clean last year. So we started a campaign called Wetwipes turn nasty when you flush them which involved an online petition asking retailers and producers to put clear 'Do Not Flush' labelling on their products, as well as encouraging everyone to only flush the 3 P's down the loo – Pee, Poo and Paper! Many of our volunteers are unaware of how damaging certain behaviours might be such as putting a wetwipe down the toilet. However, Beachwatch gives us a great platform to also raise awareness round these issues.

So it is not only great to have more volunteers and more beaches taking part for data gathering but also more people that are engaging with our wider campaigns and influencing their behaviour.

Challenges

It is a challenge now to keep up the personal touch as more and more volunteers are taking part. To help still achieve the personal touch we have some office based sea champions who have helped call organisers and helped with running beach cleans and training.

Another great challenge is for certain groups to get access to their local beach. Funding for transport is difficult for some groups and not all beaches have public transport links.

Sustainability

Now in my third year my role has taken on a lot of policy work around our campaign to implement a deposit return system for bottles and cans due to data from Beachwatch showing a big increase in these items. I hope to keep the level of beaches taking part the same but the sustainability of people taking part without me being able to spend as much time promoting and adding the personal touch will be a test as to the sustainability of these numbers in my current role.

Lessons to Pass On

Pick up the phone – if you have the chance having a conversation with a volunteer or even better getting out and hands on with the project with him creates a lasting impression that will encourage them to continue to take part in the project.

Feedback has also been really important, the thank you phone calls are always very much appreciated and the newsletters and data we provide back as well as updates on our campaigns which are only possible with data from our volunteers also helps reinforce the importance of their involvement in the project.

Links

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30zrfWHPD1ov>

Parliamentary motions: [http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?](http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Simple&Keyword=great%20british%20beach%20clean&ExactPhrase=True&DateChoice=0&SortBy=DateSubmitted&ResultsPerPage=10)

[SearchType=Simple&Keyword=great%20british%20beach%20clean&ExactPhrase=True&DateChoice=0&SortBy=DateSubmitted&ResultsPerPage=10](http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Simple&Keyword=great%20british%20beach%20clean&ExactPhrase=True&DateChoice=0&SortBy=DateSubmitted&ResultsPerPage=10)

www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch